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Hong Kong Government's Ad hoc Surveillance Measures on Japanese Food

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Report Highlights:

In response to the quake-led nuclear incident in Japan, Hong Kong's Center for Food Safety (CSF) has, since 12 March, stepped up surveillance on fresh food products from Japan including milk, vegetables, fruits and meat, and conducted radiological testing. As of March 17, a total of 86 consignments were tested and all were found satisfactory. While Hong Kong consumers were reported to be stocking up on favorite Japanese food products immediately after the event, they are expected to reduce buying Japanese food for some time in the future when they believe that the products for sale have been shipped after the earthquake. The Hong Kong government assured the public that there is no concern of food supply in Hong Kong. Japan is the fourth largest agricultural and food supplier for Hong Kong and ranks top in some premium seafood products.

Summary

In response to the quake-led nuclear incident in Japan, Hong Kong's Center for Food Safety (CFS) has, since 12 March, stepped up surveillance on fresh food products from Japan including milk, vegetables, fruits and meat, and conducted radiological testing. CFS currently adopts the standards laid down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in the Guidelines Levels for Radionuclides in Food following Accidental Nuclear Contamination in testing the radiation levels of food. As of March 17, a total of 86 consignments were tested and all were found satisfactory. It is expected that some Hong Kong consumers will reduce buying Japanese food for some time fearing that they are contaminated with radiation. Some five star hotels have announced that they have stopped importing Japanese foods including meat, sashimi and sushi. Japan is the fourth largest agricultural and food supplier for Hong Kong. Japanese cuisine and foods are well received in Hong Kong and are sold at premium prices.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Observatory has set up ten radiation monitoring stations within the territory and collected air samples to examine for radioactive elements. No increase in radiation in Hong Kong has been detected to date. Also, visitors arriving from Japan may ask for a radiation screening check up at the airport on a voluntary basis. So far, no traveler has been found contaminated with radiation.

Hong Kong Government Stepping Up Food Surveillance on Japanese Food

In view of the radiation contamination risk of Japanese foods precipitated by the March 11 earthquake, Hong Kong's CSF has stepped up surveillance of fresh food items such as milk, vegetables and fruits for testing of radiation level. The spokesman for the CFS said that the Centre will concentrate the surveillance on fresh food items, especially those from the central part of Honshu. For other food items, CFS will make reference to the risk assessment and target those produced after the explosions of the nuclear plants and which stand a higher risk of contamination. The CFS pledged to the public that they will continue to monitor closely the food imported from Japan in the near future. If the place of origin or the time of production is linked to the incident, they will test the radiation level of these food items to ensure they are not contaminated. If a consignment of food is tested to have exceeded the contamination standard, the CSF will immediately detain that consignment and arrange for disposal. As of March 17, 86 consignments were tested and all were found satisfactory.

Reportedly, the HKG has managed to provide radiation screening for Japanese food imports at the airport only.

According to government sources, consignments are screened by Hand-held survey meters for surface contamination and samples will also be taken for testing using the Contamination Monitoring System (CMS). Samples with reading beyond the limits will be sent to Government Laboratory (GL) for further quantitative analysis of Iodine-131, Caesium -134 and Caesium -137. Additional samples will also be sent to GL for testing.

The CFS has updated the testing results on their website. <http://www.cfs.gov.hk/eindex.html>

The following is the latest.

Food type tested	Accumulative no. of consignment tested (March 12 to 17)
Fruits and vegetables	42
Milk and milk beverage	0
Frozen confections	0
Aquatic products	34
Meat	5
Others (eg. cereal products, snacks)	5
Total no. of consignment tested	86

Food Supplies from Japan

The Hong Kong government assured the public that Hong Kong does not have any concern over the general food supply because the food from Japan only constitutes a small part of Hong Kong total imports. The spokesman said imported fresh food from Japan consisted mainly of meat, aquatic products, milk, frozen confections, vegetables and fruit. The total import of the above foodstuffs amounted to 380 tons in 2010, with market shares ranging from below 1% (e.g. vegetables and fruits) to 5% (e.g. meat, milk and frozen confections). Import of poultry and poultry eggs from Japan has been suspended since the outbreak of avian influenza last year.

Response from the Public

Japanese food is very popular in Hong Kong and sells at premium prices. Given the fear that future Japanese foods might be radiation contaminated, many people rushed to stock their favorite Japanese foods soon after the incident. The most discernible was the long lines in front of stores selling Japanese infant powder. Mothers interviewed by the media indicated that they would probably change to other non-Japanese brands after the existing stock was gone. Also, some people tried to stock up on salt fearing that the seawater is contaminated with radiation and will affect salt availability in the future. Most recently, some five-star hotels announced that they would stop importing Japanese foods and providing Japanese dishes such as sushi and sashimi in an attempt to gain consumers' confidence. Reportedly, some Japanese restaurants requested their suppliers to provide proof that foods do not come from radiation affected areas.

Statistics

Table 1. Hong Kong: Agricultural and Food Imports from Major Suppliers

Hong Kong Import Statistics							
UDG: Agricultural, Fish & Forestry, Group 1 (2007)							
Year To Date: January – December							
Partner Country	United States Dollars			% Share			% Change 2010/2009
	2008	2009	2010	2008	2009	2010	
World	15,166,409,478	15,827,763,023	19,074,287,533	100.00	100.00	100.00	20.51
China	2,854,113,651	2,932,659,392	3,280,005,539	18.82	18.53	17.20	11.84
U.S.	2,070,371,967	2,268,520,927	3,151,291,448	13.65	14.33	16.52	38.91
Brazil	1,519,796,215	1,660,984,306	1,490,726,948	10.02	10.49	7.82	- 10.25
Japan	684,584,463	794,454,223	1,075,004,853	4.51	5.02	5.64	35.31
Thailand	771,197,297	868,649,224	804,087,074	5.08	5.49	4.22	- 7.43
Australia	692,568,168	742,834,131	744,642,905	4.57	4.69	3.90	0.24

Source: Global Trade Atlas - Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department

Table 2. Hong Kong: Major Food Items from Japan with Market Share and Ranking

Hong Kong Import Statistics From Japan				
Commodity: Agricultural, Fish & Forestry, Group 1 (2007)				
Year To Date: January – December				
Commodity	Description	2010		
		2010	Market share %	Ranking
Agricultural, Fish & Forestry		1,075,004,853	6	4
030799	Molluscs Etc Nesoi, Frozen, Dri, Salted Or In Brin	270,774,363	52	1
030729	Scallops Incl Queen, Frozen/Dried/Salted/In Brine	151,648,538	75	1
040221	Milk/Cream Cnctrd Nt Swtn Pwd/Oth Solids Ov 1.5% Fa	91,798,194	21	3
170490	Sugar Confection (Incl Wh Choc), No Cocoa, Nesoi	41,693,884	26	2
210690	Food Preparations Nesoi	39,401,158	12	3
210390	Sauces Etc. Mixed Condiments And Seasonings Nesoi	36,316,902	26	2
030710	Oysters, Live, Fresh, Chilled, Frozen, Etc	25,201,661	40	1
190590	Bread, Pastry, Cakes, Etc Nesoi & Puddings	18,518,755	8	4
110100	Wheat Or Meslin Flour	16,596,341	19	2

190230	Pasta, Prepared Nesoi	15,600,125	21	2
030269	Fish, Nesoi, With Bones, Fresh Or Chilled	14,510,291	45	1
220600	Fermented Beverages Nesoi (Cider, Perry, Mead Etc)	13,862,277	66	1
190531	Cookies (Sweet Biscuits)	13,696,533	32	1
160420	Fish, Prepared Or Preserved, Nesoi	12,989,383	15	3
160590	Molluscs, Etc., Prepared Or Preserved	11,126,750	9	5
020130	Meat Of Bovine Animals, Boneless, Fresh Or Chilled	8,964,330	14	3
030559	Fish, Dried, Whether Salted But Not Smoked Nesoi	8,951,622	2	11
030613	Shrimps And Prawns, Including In Shell, Frozen	8,190,582	5	8
220290	Nonalcoholic Beverages, Nesoi	8,159,325	6	3
020714	Chicken Cuts And Edible Offal (Inc Livers), Frozen	7,920,269	0.5	15
210310	Soy Sauce	7,619,296	29	2
081090	Fruit Nesoi, Fresh	7233394	6	3
040120	Milk/Cream Nt Cnctrd/Swt, Fat Content Ov 1% Nov-6%	5963889	11	3
080810	Apples, Fresh	5927279	5	5

Source : Global Trade Atlas - Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department